

PW/HORIZONS STYLE SHEET ADDENDUM

BIAS FREE GUIDELINES

Golden Rule

- Identify a person the way she or he asks to be identified, regardless of forthcoming litany

General Guidelines

- Mention ability, age, appearance, education, lifestyle, race and ethnicity, or sexual orientation only if it is essential to the story.

Nonessential: The black man walked into Kroger.

Essential: The black man walked into a whites-only grocery store in the segregated South

Nonessential: The girl in the wheelchair doesn't eat in the cafeteria.

Essential: The girl in the wheelchair can't eat in the cafeteria because there is no ramp.

- Use person first language, so a person's ability level, appearance, etc. does not entirely define him or her. Say *a person who is blind*, rather than *a blind person* or *the blind*; *a child with autism* rather than *the autistic child*.

- Choose language carefully when talking about groups of people; avoid phrases like *the gays*, *the deaf*, *the blind community* or *the elderly community*. Remember that not all people of a grouping think or feel the same way; if necessary to generalize, say *a majority of people over 65 years old* or *a minority of people who are gay*.
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Abilities

DISABILITIES AND IMPAIRMENTS

Avoid saying someone is *handicapped*, *disabled* or *challenged*; if applicable to the story, say he or she has disabilities, and be as specific as possible. Do not say someone is *suffering from blindness* or another disability unless they are constantly aware of pain brought about by the disability.

Incorrect: The handicapped man could not swim.

Correct: The man with paraplegia could not swim.

Incorrect: The blind woman walks with a cane.

Correct: The woman, who is blind, walks with a cane.

Current terms for talking about disabilities include *blind*, *deaf*, *cannot hear or speak* (rather than *deaf-mute* or *deaf-dumb*), *hearing impairment*, *hearing loss* (had hearing at one point, not someone who was born deaf), *congenital disability* (rather than *birth defect*), and *uses a wheelchair* (rather than *confined to*, *bound to* or *in a wheelchair*).

The term *disabilities* only applies to physical disabilities. Avoid saying *a person with mental disabilities*; instead, say *a person with a mental health diagnosis* or *a person with mental retardation*. Avoid saying someone is *mentally ill*; *he or she has a mental illness*. Be as specific as possible, for example *he has an anxiety disorder*, *serious depression* or *schizophrenia*.

ILLNESS

If someone's illness is an important point, name the illness. Avoid saying the person is a *victim of the illness* and do not assume the person is *suffering from the illness*.

Age

Since *young* and *old* are relative terms, when age is relevant, specify the age of the person you are speaking about. Avoid *senior*, *senior citizen* and *elderly* if you can use the age of the person. Do not assume all people over 65 years old are *retirees*.

Say *girl* or *boy* for a person under 18 years old; after an 18th birthday, they are *women* and *men*. *Youth* applies to boys or girls between 13–18.

Appearance

People are of different heights, weights and builds; while there are medical *averages*, there is no *normal* height, weight or build. Mention only the characteristics that are essential to the story. Do not make assumptions about why people weigh more or less than average; medical conditions, lack of resources and several other factors may make weight beyond someone's control. Do not describe a person who is thin as *anorexic* or *bulimic*, unless you know that he or she has been diagnosed as such.

Current terms include *overweight*, *underweight*, *large*, *small* and *short of stature* (rather than *dwarf*, *midget* or *little person*).

Education

Not all people choose or have the opportunity to finish high school and/or college. Do not make assumptions about someone's intelligence based on the level of education he or she has. Avoid mentioning titles or degrees unless it is essential to the story or important to the person you are writing about.

Lifestyles

CHILDREN

Not all families will have a mother and a father or multiple children. Not all women are mothers and not all men are fathers; men, women and couples choose not to have children, others cannot have children. Refrain from referring to a woman or a couple as *childless*, which presumes that having children is the norm and is desired by all.

- *Adoptive parent*: a man or woman who adopts a child
- *Biological parent*: a woman or man whose genes and DNA produce a child
- *Birth parent, birth mother*: the woman who gives to birth to a child, to whom she may have been a surrogate mother

Avoid references to *real parent* or *real child*, which discredit relationships forged through surrogate pregnancies or adoptions.

There are many models for childcare—a child may be cared for by a stay-at-home-mom, stay-at-home-dad, or in daycare if his or her parent(s) work(s) outside the home.

GENDER

There are no definite characteristics or jobs that either men or women must take on. Women work in jobs traditionally held by men, and vice versa. Men exhibit personality traditionally held by women, and vice versa. For example, a man can be nurturing without being feminine or gay; a woman can be aggressive without being masculine or a lesbian.

When describing occupations and work, find a term that is not gender specific—*mail carrier, fire fighter, crafter, staff the booth, work hours* (rather than man hours). Avoid specifying gender in a profession unless necessary.

Incorrect: Sally, the woman lawyer, proved her client was innocent.

Correct: Sally, the only woman lawyer in the firm, filed a complaint when the men lawyers all received raises and she did not.

Incorrect: Bob, the male nurse, wheeled the cart down the hall.

Correct: Bob, the only male nurse in the unit, found the doctor's greeting "Good morning, ladies" offensive.

SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC CLASSES

Avoid using words such as *comfortable, affordable, rich, poor, expensive, inexpensive* or *costly* without qualifiers. They are relative terms and often hold different meanings for the writer/speaker and the audience.

Incorrect: She drives an expensive car.

Correct: She drives a BMW that cost \$45,000.

Race and Ethnicity

Ethnicity is ancestry, history or geographical origin shared by a group of people; while *race* refers to physical characteristics shared by a group of people. Both of these are social constructs; genetic differences do not support these labels.

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the double adjective *racial ethnic* is the preferred term for people of color or communities of color. The 199th General Assembly (1987) defined a racial ethnic group as "a group that defines itself and is defined by others as being phenotypically or culturally divergent from the dominant White American group. And most crucial is the fact the racial ethnic group has held and continues to hold ascribed and unequal states in participation and representation in most, if not all major institutions of American society."

Some common and preferred phrases to describe racial ethnic identity are

- *African*: a person from one of the many countries on the continent of Africa; if possible, other than African, provide the nationality of the person (Kenyan, Ethiopian, etc.)
- *African American*: a black American who is from or has ancestors from Africa and has become an American or was born in the United States (Kenyan American, Ethiopian American, etc.). With more frequency, white South Africans who become citizens of the United States refer to themselves as African American; this is also correct
- *American*: commonly used to mean someone from the United States; since there are North and South America and North America includes Canada and Mexico, *American* is

not as accurate as it needs to be—try to use *citizen of the United States*. Do not assume everyone living in the United States is a citizen; see *immigrant*, *citizen* and *resident*

- *Anglo*: English; not synonymous with Caucasian. The preferred term is *European American*
 - *Arab*: a person whose native language is Arabic (Egyptian, Iraqi, Lebanese, etc.)
 - *Arab American*: an American who is from or has ancestors from the Middle East/Arabic countries (Egyptian American, Iraqi American, Jordanian American, Lebanese American, etc.)
 - *Asian*: a person from Asia, which includes Japan, Korea, China, Vietnam
 - *Asian American*: an American who has immigrated from or has ancestors from Asia (Japanese American, Korean American, Chinese American, Vietnamese American)
 - *black*: refers to a person of African descent, who could be from anywhere in the world and of any nationality or cultural identity
 - *Caribbean*: a person from one of the many islands in the Caribbean Ocean from the tip of Florida to South America (Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti, etc.)
 - *Caribbean American*: an American who immigrated from or has ancestors from the Caribbean (Jamaican American, Cuban American, Haitian American, etc.)
 - *Caucasian*: a white person who is from or has ancestors from Northern or Western Europe
 - *citizen*: a naturalized or native person who by law has the rights and privileges outlined by that country's government
 - *European American*: an American is from or has ancestors from Northern or Western Europe; see also *Caucasian* and *Anglo*
 - *First Nation (people of the . . . or . . . people)* or *First People*: a person whose ancestors were native to the Americas before European settlement (e.g. Cherokee, Mayan, Choctaw, Iroquois, etc); preferred over *Native American* or *American Indian*
 - *Hispanic*: a person who is from or has ancestors from a Spanish-speaking country; could be from Spain, United States, Mexico or any country in Central or South America
 - *Hispanic American*: an American who is from or has ancestors from a Spanish-speaking country
 - *immigrant*: a person who moves to a country to become a citizen there or to live there as a resident without becoming a citizen
 - *Jewish*: a person whose ethnic origin includes the Jewish religious and or/cultural traditions; preferred over *Jew*
 - *Latin American*: an American who comes from or has ancestors from Central or South America or parts of the United States where the national language is Spanish
 - *Latino/a*: a non-European, Spanish-speaking man or woman
 - *Native American*: a person whose ancestors were native to the Americas before European settlement (e.g. Cherokee, Mayan, Choctaw, Iroquois, etc); see also *First Nation*
 - *resident*: a person who has lived in a country and may or may not be a citizen of the country
 - *white*: refers to people of European descent, all over the world, except for those who identify themselves as Hispanic
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Religion

Terms used within one religion, denomination or branch do not necessarily apply to all traditions. Different religions call their houses of worship by different names—*church, mosque, temple, meeting house* or *synagogue*. Not all religions use the term *denominations*; some say *branches, sects* or *movements*. *Minister, preacher, priest, pastor, bishop, rabbi, parson, imam* and *guru* are a few of the specific titles for religious leaders; they are not interchangeable. *Sabbath* means day set aside for worship; it could be Friday, Saturday, Sunday or Monday, depending on the religious tradition.

Talk about Christianity in a way that is not imperialistic. Do not assume that Christians hold authority over all other religions or that Christianity offers something better than other religions.

*See also *Guidelines on Avoiding Antisemitism*

Sexual Orientation and Gender

Avoid saying *sexual preference*; instead, use *sexual orientation*.

- *Bisexual*: a person who has sexual attraction for both men and women
 - *Gay*: a homosexual man (use *gay* rather than *homosexual*)
 - *Lesbian*: a homosexual woman (use *lesbian* rather than *gay*)
 - *Transgendered*: a person who is transsexual or transvestite, or a person whose gender may be unclear for physiological or psychological reasons; not a sexual orientation
 - *Transsexual*: a person who identifies psychologically, affectionally and sexually with the opposite gender; he or she may undergo medical procedures to align their physical appearance with their sexual and emotional orientation
 - *Transvestite*: a person who dresses as a member of the opposite gender for emotional or sexual gratification
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General references

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